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ABSTRACT

In this series of National Public Radio interviews, individuals from education and television broadcasting discuss the use and abuse of television by schools and the influence of television on children in home viewing. It is asserted that television is and will continue to be watched, and therefore it is necessary to learn how to deal with it. By having children view programs, create programs, and read scripts, schools do use television to help teach organizational, creative, writing, and reading skills, in addition to critical viewing skills. These interviews noted that: (1) teachers feel that television produces unrealistic competition between the teacher and entertainer; (2) children are able to learn at varying rates from instructional television; (3) children are influenced by television; (4) violence in the media has been replaced by sex; which has proved to be difficult to define; (5) broadcasting networks argue that television productions and stereotypical characters merely reflect social issues; (6) the Parent Teachers Association has issued viewing guides to help parents select productions; and (7) despite discriminate selection, too much television viewing has an effect on children's ability to develop cognitively or develop complex skills. (CWM)

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"TV AND KIDS"
(Part I)

MUSIC: Theme to "Starsky and Hutch."

ANNOUNCER: "Starsky and Hutch" will continue in a moment.

MERROW: Hey, is that you, Starsky?

REINHARDT: Heah, Hutch?

MERROW: Hey, you're not Starsky. You sound like...

REINHARDT: Wonder Woman? The Bionic Woman? One of Charley's Angels?

MERROW: You've been watching too much TV. You sound like Barbara Reinhardt.

REINHARDT: I am Barbara Reinhardt. And You're John Merrow, not Starsky, not Hutch, and certainly not the Six Million Dollar Man.

MERROW: And this isn't TV. It's public radio, and it's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

REINHARDT: But we are worrying about TV this week, particularly about how it's used and abused in our schools.

MERROW: And next week, we'll focus on TV's impact in your living room, at home.

REINHARDT: That was a commercial for next week's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. Now, back to the show.

* * *

WOMAN: Sometimes I wonder, as I take a sort of broad view of where society has come from and where it's going, whether when the printing press was first invented maybe the elders of society said, "Oh, our children aren't going to be using their memories; they're going to write everything down and look it up." You know, they'd lament whatever passed as a result of the printing press. Now, maybe we're over-lamenting the loss of the ability to read and write as a result of television. Maybe there will be a new kind of literacy based on that visual medium. And maybe the creative people in the future won't be the people who can read and write the best, but the people who can appreciate and understand and create television the best.

* * *

MERROW: Instructional television. Educational television. Those are terms you don't hear much any more, but in the 1950s, television in the classroom was a hot item in the field of teaching.

REINHARDT: But TV sets have not replaced teachers. In fact, the term "educational TV" has been changed; the new term is "public TV," and it's come to mean a lot more than classes-on-the-air.

MERROW: But TV is used in the schools. How much is not easy to find out. Outside of school, kids watch TV incessantly. The average child watches 20 to 25 hours a week, which is about three hours a day.

REINHARDT: Some children -- they're called "heavy users -- watch more than forty hours a week. That's about six hours a day.

MERROW: But in school? Not much TV watching. Some research indicates that about half of public elementary schools have at least one TV set.

REINHARDT: One study indicates that in one third of our elementary schools, children watched "The Electric Company" at least once a week. More about that later.

KIDS MAKE THEIR OWN TV PROGRAMS

COOK: Okay, I want the whole crew now to get in front of the outside monitor up on top of that sign, and we're going to take a look at it and see what we can do to improve it.

REINHARDT: In Hingham, Massachusetts, kids at Plymouth River Elementary School learn to put their own TV programs together, with the help of media specialist Glenn Cook.

COOK: Television is the means of communication with the kids of today. And I think they should know something about that means of communication. Kids should know how it operates; they should know what goes into making a program. They should know that people make TV programs and that they can slant them, that they can be propaganda. And I think we have to teach our kids to be able to communicate with TV just like they should be able to communicate with reading and writing.

STUDENT: Each class made their own, like, morning magazine, you know. We did a morning magazine.

STUDENT: They teach you how to use all different kind of machines and stuff, Mr. Cook does.

COOK: (to students) You're going to get her and her. And you're going to get him and him. Okay? When he finishes, you'll skip over her and get to the next one. That way we'll be able to cut between three and two.

STUDENT: We don't get marked for anything, for this. We don't get marked for this.

COOK: It takes writing skills. It takes organization skills. It takes creative skills to think of the idea in the first place and to make it into something that will come across as interesting on television, or even on a raido speaker. It takes visual skills; it takes drawing skills. Just about everything that we think of as a good result of education you can kind of see in a good TV show.

STUDENT: Where, that's what I'd like to know.

COOK: (to student) Right there, it's in your hand. If it was any closer, it would bite you. Now props, are you here?

COOK: We need so many more people than just the star who's up front. We need the cameraman, the switcher, the props, and so forth.

STUDENT: Move, Claire. Can't you see I'm trying to do something?

COOK: (to students) Get your cards in front of you now, the way they belong.

STUDENT: Mr. Cook, are these blurry from the lights?

COOK: (to students) Now, be nice and quiet until you see the red light, and then give it a lot of pizzazz. Speak up a little bit, a little more enthusiasm. Go ahead David. . . . Freeze it, freeze it. Who is camera one?

STUDENT: Me.

COOK: Okay, what I wanted you to do then. The picture had a few more things down here. It would have bee nice if you were in close and started there and then panned it. Pan means going from side to side like that, okay? So get one side, then slowly move down that way. It puts a little more motion and makes it a little more interesting to see. This handle is very loose. What does that mean?

STUDENT: Tighten it.

COOK: You left it loose, yeah. We don't want it to tip over, and get a bill for a hundred dollars, Okay, go.

COOK: I don't think that, with imagination, that it costs a lot to teach about television in the classroom. If you have a couple of TV cameras. If you have a videotape recorder. If you have a switcher. You can have a studio for around $2,000. That works.

STUDENT: Speaking of grade six, congratulations to . . .

COOK: I think also, that I would like them to become a more discriminant viewer and a more knowledgable viewer, so that they can look at a production on television, on commercial television and say, "I know how they did that."

REINHARDT: That report on the TV program at the Plymouth River Elementary School in Hingham, Massachusetts was produced for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Vivian Ducat and Joan Morgan of member station WGBH, Boston.

MERROW: That's one way TV can be used in school, maybe the most exciting use of all, what educators like to call "hands on."

REINHARDT: But it seems to be the least common, perhaps because it's the most complicated and most expensive. It's a lot cheaper to study TV shows that other people make.

WHY STUDY TV IN SCHOOL?

SINGER: We send children to the library. We say go read a book. We give them books to take home to read. We send them to different places to do study projects. What is so inherently wrong with television that it can't be in exactly the same category. In fact, it's even more natural. Because it is easier to find. You don't have to go to a hundred different places to find what will deliver what you're looking for.

REINHARDT: That's William Singer, of Prime Time School Television, a group in Chicago that prepares and distributes study guides for programs like "Eleanor and Franklin," "Holocaust," and "Roots." The guides go to between 100,000 and 500,000 teachers and contain discussion topics for classroom use, a program synopsis, and a bibliography.

MERROW: Singer's group, called Prime Time School Television, also prepares special units not specifically geared to one TV program, but built around a single theme and the way it's treated on a variety of programs.

SINGER: We produced a unit called "Television, Police, and the Law," which is a nine-week course of instruction which really tries to deal with three different areas. One: -- or two different areas -- the reality of police in our society. What do they really do, as contrasted with what you see on television? As so, we asked -- one of the lessons, for example, requires the students to invite or have a local police person come into the classroom and talk about things like: how many times do you really fire your gun? The average is minimal over a twenty year service period; most police officers may fire their gun once or twice. If you watch television, you get an idea that they're firing them every 10 minutes.

One of the projects we suggested in that unit is to track the crime statistics in their area and to realize how many crimes are committed, and for how many crimes how many arrests are made, and for every arrest that's made how many cases come to trial, and of those that actually come to trial how many are actually convicted, and of those that are actually convicted how many actually serve some time in a prison or jail facility. Because we want a realistic understanding of the difficulties of police work. And it isn't all just "Starsky and Hutch" we get 'em every time, the bad guys always lose, and the good guys always win, and police work is exciting and shoot 'em up and all that. It is a much different picture when you talk to a policeman and you learn that a lot of their work is in family quarrels and domestic relations, and getting cats out of trees and things like that. We wanted to present a more realistic picture of that. And as far as the law part of it, we wanted to have, and the unit spends a good deal of time, on dealing with legal constraints. When Kojak knocks down a door without a search warrant, was he legally capable of doing that? Did the television program portray that accurately?

REINHARDT: Part of this program, though, is requiring the kids to watch the cops and robbers shows that are on --

SINGER: Yes, that's true. But we make two assumptions. One, that many of them are going to be watched anyway. And two, that when you watch them with the classroom part of it built in, you're going to become much more critical viewers. And we've tested the response of this, and students wrote back to us very perceptively. They now know that what they see is fantasy, and if they understand it from that perspective, we've accomplished a lot. Because if they're much more realistic and critical viewers of that, they will be much more realistic and critical viewers of other programs as well.

REINHARDT: Even if you're teaching them, though, to be critical viewers, aren't you saying, in a subtle way, "Well, you can't lick 'em, so we might as well join 'em?" I mean, aren't you developing in the kids --

SINGER: I'm not against that. I don't think that anybody's going to eradicate television from our lives, and I'm not sure anybody should try. I'm not against television, per se. I happen to watch it at my own discretion, sometimes just for pure entertainment, and my children do as well. I happen to think that television can be very good. My children and I watched "Roots" -- my daughter; my son's too young. But my daughter and I watched "Roots" and we had a number of conversations about that program. I thought that was a fantastic learning experience. I can't tell you the number of people who talked to us about watching the "Holocaust" or "Eleanor and Franklin." There are all kind of programs on that are good, and I'm not suggesting that we leave them alone, and forget about them. I think, on the contrary, they should be encouraged. And as long as this medium is around, and as long as some of the other shows that are there primarily for entertainment, and as long as kids are going to watch those, I'd rather make them more critical viewers of those shows as well.

MERROW: William Singer, of Prime Time School Television, a Chicago group that's trying to help teachers use TV at home in the curriculum.

REINHARDT: Here's an ironic twist. Some teachers are using TV to get their students to read. Once again, it takes advantage of the fact that kids spend a good portion of their day in front of the tube.

MERROW: In Philadelphia, ten years ago, Dr. Michael McAndrew was frustrated by his students' failure to read, or to even care about reading.He requisitioned a video recorder from the school system, recorded the popular programs, transcribed the scripts in longhand, typed them up, and distributed them to his students.

REINHARDT: The response was phenomenal, McAndrew says, and kids began reading. A couple of years ago, a private company, Capital Cities Communications, offered to help McAndrew acquire and distribute scripts. Today, with the cooperation of the networks, students in Philadelphia, New York City and Washington regularly receive scripts in advance of the TV programs. Reading the scripts is a requirement; watching the shows is not. But most kids do that anyway.

MERROW: Liane Hansen talked to Michael McAndrew.

STUDYING TV SCRIPTS

McANDREW: I commandered it, and somehow persuaded the powers to be to allow me to take it home. And at home, I began recording from the air video programs, illegally. They were the most popular programs of the day. In that day, of course, it was "Lucy," and "Gomer," and "Ironsides," and "Brian's Song." And then I would replay it after I finished. I would rewind it and then begin arduously over again. And this time, copying verbatim in longhand what I had seen on the screen. Brought it back, put it to print, typed it up, ran it off, brought it into the classroom with an introduction, and let it up to the children to see what their responses would be.

Literally overnight, they ran away with the scripts. They voraciously just devoured them.

HANSEN: Experiments began with home viewing. Two years ago, the script for the special "Eleanor and Franklin" was published in the newspaper for 125,000 secondary school students. The audience share for that program in Philadelphia was 49 percent. And it was not long before Capital Cities Communications offered to aid Dr. McAndrew in acquiring scripts of popular prime time programs in advance. They would underwrite the costs of printing and distributing the scripts, as well as comprehensive teacher guides. In the fall of 1977, the home viewing program was incorporated into the reading structure of Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington D.C. Students and teachers would receive the scripts once a month for ten months, three weeks before the airing of the show. Work would focus on vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills.

STUDENT: My dad said, "You're crazy; you can't be watching television while you're reading a script." But my mom thought it would be pretty good because she used to be a teacher at this school, and so she just thought you could learn a lot more words.

HANSEN: Paula Barrow, who teaches reading to those sixth graders, says the program has strengths, and weaknesses.

BARROW: I feel the strengths are that it has really motivated students. It's a new approach for them, and so they're thrilled when they get their hand on that first script. And they know that in a couple of weeks they can go home and see this program on television. I also, and to me it's an important factor, I think many of the kids are sharing a little more time at home with their parents that they might not otherwise be spending with their family.

HANSEN: Now, does the regular reading complement the television scripts that you've been using, or have you been using totally different kinds of, you know, fiction and non-fiction?

BARROW: They definitely do complement each other. Because I'm doing the same things with the scripts as I am, say with a Basil Reader. So, we're getting the same kinds of things that I'm looking for with both materials. However, there is a difference between reading script and dialogue, and reading a paragraph. Or between reading what I consider fine literature -- let's say Newberry literature -- and reading a script where incomplete sentences are used just because this is the way a script is written. I think the children need to see all types of writing, script writing, prose, poetry, all types. So that I need time for these other forms, even though I might be working with the same kinds of skills no matter what form I'm using.

HANSEN: The home viewing program is currently being evaluated by Pennsylvania State University to determine whether there has been any demonstrable effect on reading skills. Although the verdict won't be in until this fall, tangible results from teacher observation and California achievement tests have come in.

MAN: Children are now turning into wanting to go to a reading class. They want to take these books home. We found out from the evaluation that their outside reading has increased 55 percent.

STUDENT: I've learned a lot of new vocabularly words, and I've learned how to read some difficult words. And I got my report card and, you see, my grade went up.

REINHARDT: That report for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION from Liane Hansen, station WUHY, Philadelphia.

MERROW: "TV Helps Raise Student Grades" -- That headline would certainly please TV people, who, after all, want you and me and everyone else to watch the programs, and -- most importantly -- the commercials.

REINHARDT: It's easy to be cynical about the TV industry, to picture the top guys as mindless ogres, intent only on profits. So what if they turn all our brains to mush in the process.

MERROW: In fact, the TV people we've talked to argue for parental responsibility. They say, "Sure, we broadcast all day, but responsible parents

don't let kids watch that much TV."

REINHARDT: Pam Warford is "community liaison" with the ABC television network. Basically, that's public relations, but her public is schools and teachers. She encourages teachers to use TV in their work.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE NETWORKS

WARFORD: There are teachers who have drawn upon the children's interest in television to, for example in the classroom, use the popular shows to develop vocabulary. For example, one teacher who was teaching in an inner city school used the idea of taking the "Batman" series. And I'm not aware which network that is (laughs), but at any rate, using the exclamations that were flashed on that show periodically to develop a whole series of exercises around exclamations and what they mean. And that's on a very rudimentary level and that was starting with kids who were very unmotivated. But, for children who are more motivated, there are fine programs that can be used in the classroom based around social studies and English primarily, but sometimes science too. Units which draw upon the children's interest. Beyond that, I think the teachers are increasingly becoming aware of the potential of developing critical awareness in children.

MERROW: What's that mean?

WARFORD: Well, we tend to acknowledge that children should have critical skills in regard to books, for example. And we'd like the children to know the difference between a good book and a bad book. The same applies to television. There has been little done in terms of developing viewing skills, critical skills in relation to television.

MERROW: So, they should know when they're watching junk.

WARFORD: Right. And that doesn't mean we would not want them to enjoy not what I would call junk, but perhaps a program that's strictly entertainment like "Donny and Marie," but they should know that that's strictly entertainment.

MERROW: You want schools to teach kids critical skills to the extent that they say, "Well, I'm not going to watch that junk?"

WARFORD: That's a loaded question. I think what I'm saying is -- 'cause there are times when children and adults want sheer entertainment. And I'm not making any value judgments on entertainment or educational programming. I think the line between what is educational and what is instructional is very thin. Someone has said that all television is educational, and we may not always agree with what our children are learning or what our students are learning, but they should have some critical skills in terms of evaluating whether the program worked.

MERROW: Do you want schools to teach kids how to watch advertisements, how to detect the selling techniques so they won't be so vulnerable?

WARFORD: You've given me an opportunity to mention the Yale study which is in operation now. It's an 18-month study, which ABC is funding with a grant, in which two Yale psychologists, Dorothy and Jerome Singer, are going to be doing precisely what you're talking about. And that is, they've developed a module for use in third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms to be used with children to not only understand how commercials are made but how programs are made. How, for example, on commercials a product is put closer to the camera so that it looks larger, et cetera. And they are expecting that when the control and experimental groups are compared, that the children who have a greater awareness of television will be more selective in their viewing. And also, the end result of this study will be a manual which can be used by teachers.

MERROW: Some people say kids are passive when they watch. You don't, you think kids are active when they watch TV?

WARFORD: I think they can be both. I'm not making a judgment here about one or the other, but I think the potential for television with children to watch it in an active way is enormous, and I think it's someting that teachers

are beginning to realize. I think parental responsibility is an issue here. I think parents who sit and watch television with their children and talk to them about it have opened up a way of communicating with their children that might not have been available to them before. I know that, for example, things have come up when my children are watching television, when they'll say, "That's not realistic." Or, when they are watching a cartoon, it doesn't seem very real to them. Then we talk about why, and sometimes it connects with their own everyday life.

REINHARDT: Pam Warford of the ABC television network.

* * *

COMMERCIAL: "Hungry Hippos" excerpt.

* * *

MERROW: Some school programs go beyond using TV shows in the classroom. They also show TV commercials to demonstrate how they manipulate kids or their parents.

* * *

COMMERCIAL: "Cocoa Puffs" excerpt.

* * *

MERROW: Wait, don't run out and buy "Cocoa Puffs."

REINHARDT: Yeah, stick around and Barbara Boyer Walter will show you how to resist that ad and others like it. Well, actually, she's reporting on a couple of school programs that are designed to help kids understand commercials, and to resist them.

TEACHING RESISTANCE TO COMMERCIALS

WALTER: Don Roberts, an Associate Professor at Stanford University's Institute for Communication Research, has conducted recent experiments that indicate that youngsters at least from age seven can be immunized from the super-slick advertising techniques used for making commercials. Roberts used two recently made, 15-minute, instructional films which were especially designed to help children dissect the complex ways in which commercials are made. One is the Consumers Union film called "The Six Billion Dollar Sell." The other is "Seeing Through Commercials," by Vision Films. Both films, according to Roberts, successfully educated seven to fourteen-year olds about the persuasion techniques used in commercials.

ROBERTS: I think the two different films take a little different approach. In the "Six Billion Dollar Sell," they examine a whole variety of persuasive techniques: the celebrity appeal, the use of a premium in a package, use of pseudo-scientific sounding names or chemical formulae, "new, new, new," -- you can always say something is new even if you change the color, brand loyalty. The second film concentrated more on some of the filmic or video techniques available to people making commercials, trying to teach people what fast editing or changing the lighting or the use of sound effects -- how those things can make a product much more attractive. We have some highly tentative evidence that the children who were least skeptical of commercials before they ever saw the films were the children who watched the most television. After seeing the film, these were the children who became most skeptical.

One of the commercials that we used for our testing had Bill Cosby in it, and one of the films deals with celebrity appeals. And it turns out that after seeing this, the kids decided that, no, Bill Cosby really didn't know that much about "Jello" after all, and so I don't know; he shouldn't do a show in Saratoga, I don't think.

WALTER: Katey and Sean are two eight-year olds who saw the films.

KATEY: I learned that they moved the camera close up when they're

filming it to make it look bigger. And, I already knew that they made special sound effects.

WALTER: Do you think commercials are being honest to you?

KATEY: No, not at all. They're trying to get us to buy the things and think that they're really, you know, great.

WALTER: Sean, are you going to buy things now just because you see them on TV, after you've looked at that movie?

SEAN: I don't know. Well, I might.

WALTER: Can you believe commercials, all commercials that you see?

SEAN: Well, no. They really lie to you at lot with the way they tell you things about the toys that you buy.

WALTER: Do you think a lot of kids are influenced by television commercials?

SEAN: If they saw this movie, I guess they wouldn't be.

WALTER: Don Roberts has not yet had a reaction from the makers of commercials about this study.

ROBERTS: There's hardly been time. However, I do hope when they see it we will get a response, which is probably not the response that we're going to get. But, what I would like to see them do is get engaged in making public service announcements for children, using some of the ideas in these films, trimming them down into possibly 60-second public service spots to teach the child about consumer behavior and consumer learning. And possibly even to teach children about such things as nutrition. There's a great deal of money that goes into advertising junk food. And there's a great deal of time that goes into it. And I'd like to see some of that put into teaching kids about nutrition. It seems to me that those are public airwaves and that there should be more responsibility exercised than I see being exercised by the advertisers who are aiming at children. If we're going to live in a period where everyone is going to tell us it's time to conserve, it's time to cut back, it's time to use only what we need, how then can we justify bombarding our children with over 20,000 messages a year which say to consume is to be happy? We've got two different issues that are just in diametric conflict. Throughout history, we have considered children to be a special audience, by virtue of the fact that they don't have the experience and they don't have the analytic and information processing skills that adults are presumed to have. Therefore we have always tried to protect them.

And my own hunch is that there are going to be changes coming. I'm not sure exactly what form they'll take, but changes are coming.

MERROW: That report for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION from Barbara Boyer Walter in San Francisco, California.

ANNOUNCER: ("Starsky and Hutch" music). "Starsky and Hutch will continue in a moment."

REINHARDT: No they won't. Not on your life. This is OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, and this is part one of our investigation into the ways TV affects children, in and out of school. We'll tell you how to get a transcript at the end of the show.

* * *

MUSIC: Theme from "Sesame Street."

* * *

REINHARDT: Sesame Street has made television history, and by now, since its debut in 1969, millions of pre school children have cut their teeth, learned numbers, letters, and cooperation from Big Bird, Bert and Ernie, and Kermit the Frog.

KERMIT: Hello! Kermit the Frog here, of Sesame Street News, and I'm speaking to you today from Spain where Christopher Columbus is about to set sail to discover America. And I think I see Christopher Columbus coming here now.

COLUMBUS: Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream --

KERMIT: Excuse me sir, Christopher. Kermit the Frog here, of Sesame Street News. I was wondering if I could ask you a couple questions. How was it that you intend to do that which you are planning to do here today. I mean, like, how are you going to discover America, huh?

COLUMBUS: Uh, well, I'm going to sail across the ocean in them there three boats.

KERMIT: Oh, you got three boats.

COLUMBUS: Yeah. There's one.

KERMIT: One.

COLUMBUS: That's two.

KERMIT: Two.

COLUMBUS: And there's another boat over here; that's three.

KERMIT: Oh, three boats. That certainly sounds like a good plan, sir. I wish you well on it.

COLUMBUS: Well, thanks a lot, but say, what time is it?

KERMIT: It's about 1492.

COLUMBUS: Oh, if I'm going to discover America, I've got to get going. Away there maties! Hoist the main sail . . .

CROWD: Goodbye! Bye-bye! . . .

MERROW: One measure of the success of Sesame Street has to be the intensity of the criticism it's received. One of the biggest complaints: it's passive, not active, because it imitates the form of TV commercials -- short snappy messages for the letter "s" or the number 7 -- and that somehow encourages short attention spans and prepares kids for life as consumers. Another complaint is that Sesame Street doesn't reach the audience it was intended to reach, disadvantaged kids who need extra help.

REINHARDT: Who learns the most from Sesame Street? Middle class and upper middle class kids.

MERROW: Disadvantaged kids are also learning when they watch Sesame Street, but not as fast, which means the gap between poor kids and middle class kids has gotten bigger. I spoke with Dr. Keith Mielke of the Childrens Television Workship, which produces Sesame Street, and asked him about the gap.

WHO LEARNS FROM SESAME STREET?

MIELKE: Well, I think any program that's going to be on a mass medium such as television has got to be widely appealing. And Sesame Street was designed to be widely appealing, not just appealing to a certain stratum. And it was widely appealing. And so the increases in learning that take place in the more advantaged homes have the advantage of parents who may have books in the home or parents who may discuss the program with the children. And so, the extent to which they learn even faster is a fact of the uncontrolled, voluntary television audience. The real question is whether the viewer of Sesame Street gains, and the research indicates that that's clearly the case across the board. I think the real issue is whether this early, pre-school preparation can bring a child up to a point of sufficiency to not feel frustrated in school and to experience the joy of learning. And, I think that has been successful across

the board. Now, to the extant that some homes have more advantageous learning environments than others cannot be controlled. But it's clear that the implied solution of somehow blacking the program out to homes that have a rich educational environment would not be appropriate.

MERROW: Before I turned this machine on, I said I want to talk about the gap, and you said, "Not the gap; I don't want to talk about the gap." Why?

MIELKE: Because it was never a matter of CTW policy to close the gap. The idea was to make a program that would be widely appealing and beneficial to all children. And there's a set of skills, such as learning the alphabet, and as quickly as you can learn the alphabet and have the joy of that achievement and have a basis of learning on which other learning can accrue, well that's a benefit to the child. And it was not perceived as a sociological gap contest.

MERROW: There's some argument about that. That the original talk about Sesame Street was bring those kids up. That implicitly say, "Hey, we're gonna bring them up to where the other people are."

MIELKE: The goal was to help all children, and I think we've done that.

REINHARDT: Dr. Keith Mielke, of the Childrens Television Workshop, which produces Sesame Street.

MERROW: Sesame Street is aimed at pre-schoolers, most of whom watch it at home. But CTW does produce a program for children in the first grades of school.

REINHARDT: That program is the Electric Company, and research indicates that it too is an effective teacher. About a third of our elementary schools say they use the Electric Company in class at least once a week. That's 19,000 schools.

MERROW: The same research indicates that children who watch Electric Company are learning basic skills earlier than kids who don't watch it.

REINHARDT: And just in case you're not a regular with the Electric Company, it's time you got turned on.

* * *

(Song: "Easy Reader")

EASY: "Easy Ready, that's my name.
Readin', readin', that's my game.
Top to bottom, left to right
That readin' stuff is out of sight.
Easy Reader that's my name."

GIRL: How's it going Easy sugar?

EASY: What do you say, baby? Hey, listen, I need something cool to drink. give me a bottle of that Doctor Delight.

GIRL: You got it.

EASY: Ah! Doctor Delight. Eight fluid ounces. Contains natural and artificial flavoring. Caramel coloring. Maltose, dextrose, and one tenth of one percent of benzoate of soda as a preservative. Look here, I'm going to see you later, all right?

GIRL: I don't want to break up your day, sugar, but are you not going to drink that Doctor Delight?

EASY: No, honey, I don't want to drink that stuff. I just want to read it.

GIRL: Oh, get on out of here. That's easy.

MERROW: Television in the schools. So far, we've heard about a couple of approaches. Tha hand-on technique, in which kids make their own programs which are then broadcast throughout their school. That sounds like great fun, but it's not very common.

REINHARDT: Some teachers use TV scripts to help teach reading, and there are programs to make kids into "critical" TV watchers, able to understand the difference between good and bad TV, and able to resist commercials.

MERROW: None of this is how it was all imagined back in the early days. Then, people talked about instructional TV, educational TV, with the implicit notion that good instructional TV would, or at least, could, replace the teacher.

EARLY IDEAS ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL TV

GEORGE: You can't use chalk and a blackboard to take somebody into Africa today and explain Africa. You really need to see what's happening and television is the way to do it.

MERROW: That's Donna George, State Coordinator for Instructional TV in California. She described her vision of instructional TV's possibilities to Henry Glenn.

GEORGE: You can bring community resources into the classroom. You know, we talk about using the community, but it's a marvelous idea in theory. It's very difficult to do, and it's going to get harder. Field trips are costly. With the energy shortages coming on us, they are going to be actually prohibitive. And what we have found when we do a lot of studies of kids when they go on field trips -- I'm talking about younger children now -- we give them camera so we can see what did the child really learn on this field trip. We find that they come back with pictures of each other, usually making funny faces at the camera. So you wonder sometimes, what was the value of all of this. And you certainly can't put lions, and tigers, and giraffes in school busses and truck them the other way, because they just don't move very well. So, it's really difficult to really do a good job on community resources. And yet, with television, it's possible. We could do, for instance here in Long Beach, we could do marvelous in-school kinds of television lessons on Queen Mary, on the growth of Signal Hill. That's a real part of California history, a very important part of our economy as well.

On the development of the Harbor. We have one of the finest harbors in the world. On the whole shoreline plan and on how we're using those resources, on planning the ecology, the environment, all the things that took place there -- we could capture those on a series of programs so that they were available to any teacher at any time, and then you constantly update. As that program gets out of date, you bring it up to date. And the child then sees the harbor up close. He meets the harbormaster and talks to him. I mean, really sees that person. This is the sort of thing that television can do.

MERROW: Donna George, State Coordinator for Instructional TV in California, talking with Henry Glenn of Station KLON in Long Beach, California.

REINHARDT: She's excited about what television can do, specifically instructional television. And notice that she's not talking about replacing teachers, not at all.

TELEVISION FOR INSTRUCTION

PERRIN: Television was presented years ago as something that could replace teachers. But it turns out that television is much more effective if it can be used, to use a phrase that we've been hearning more recently, as an electronic textbook. It's a major resource for teachers, but it's only that. It's -- television was never intended to be used as the replacement for the teacher.

REINHARDT: That's William Perrin of the Agency for Instructional Television in Bloomington, Indiana. He says that ITV, as it's called, shouldn't be seen as a threat. But, at one time, it was, because of some misconceptions

in the early days.

PERRIN: In the 1950s, people expected that somehow the magical quality that they thought they perceived in television would do things in the classroom of and by itself. Unfortunately, many of the efforts that were made to use television for direct instruction fell flat because the programs that were produced were largely reproductions of classroom teaching. Bring a camera into a classroom, turn it on, and record what was actually going on in that classroom, without taking into account some of the magical properties that people knew existed but people hadn't learned to exploit. What we saw on the screen, the black and white screen, was a teacher and a chalkboard and a desk, and all of the standard paraphernalia of a classroom.

REINHARDT: So, all they were really doing is just providing another teacher who looked very much like the one we had right here and really could bring in only different views, but no other pictures of life.

PERRIN: Yes, the perhaps most unfortunate thing that developed was the idea that you could use television to bring a so-called master teacher into a classroom. And that master teacher would somehow provide a quality of instruction which was infinitely superior to the instruction that was already being provided by the classroom teacher assigned to that school, to that classroom. You can imagine the effect this had on the local classroom teacher. One effect was that the local classroom teacher was less than thrilled with the idea of using television in the classroom because she or he thought that they might very well suffer by comparison with this paragon from some place who had been recorded doing some wonderful job of teaching that couldn't presumably be accomplished by the local person out in Peru, Indiana or some other small town in some other state.

REINHARDT: William Perrin of the Agency for Instructional Television in Bloomington, Indiana. That's a group that distributes locally-produced TV series to other school districts. The Agency also directs production of new series for groups of states and Canadian provinces. The idea is to give state education agencies more say in new series and to share the cost of higher quality programs.

MERROW: Perrin is optimistic about ITV, but there's not much evidence that it's all that popular in the school. One reason may be the direction that public TV has taken: it's gone away from "education."

REINHARDT: If you ever want to see a public television employee wince, ask him or her how things are in educational television these days.

MERROW: Richard Bell is chariman of a new group, calling itself the National Coalition for Instructional Telecommunications. He laments the change in public television. He talked with Keith Staudte.

THE CHANGE IN PUBLIC TELEVISION

BELL: They are not directly involved with the instructional process. They're concerned with broadcasting; they're concerned with ratings, if you will. Today, they are very much concerned with audience building audience, building financial support, providing an adult audience with a variety of kinds of programming that they cannot get on the commercial channels. Well, that's fine. But, they do not put their emphasis on instruction; they have not cultivated the instructional process. They talk about bridging the gap between the educational broadcasters and the educators, which for some of us who have been working with this for a long time came as a big shock. Because I thought the public broadcasting people were educators. Many of us were in the earlier days. A good many of the station managers and program directors were educators, came from an educational background and that was their profession. They were using broadcasting as their means of carrying on education. Today, it has swung much more over to an emphasis on broadcasting. They are professional broadcasters in most of the public television stations. And it's certainly indicative of the approach that some years back they decided they wouldn't even use the term "educational" any more, on the grounds that, apparently, they had little faith in education and little faith in the fact that the public would watch or listen to an educational program. So, they went "public." They call

themselves public television stations and radio stations. And I think that is indicative of where they are putting their emphasis, and points up the fact that there isn't enough of this other channel, this other thrust that was very clearly in the minds of the FCC and of educators all along the line, the instructional thrust to receive some major impetus.

Because on a national level, there are millions of dollars going into public television and radio. Many of the states are putting literally millions of dollars into these things. Fine. That's well and good. But we feel, many of us feel, that it's time there were a parity, if you will, an equal thrust, in the area of instruction. And when I say "we," or "many of us think that," at our meeting in Kansas City on April 15, when we formed the National Coalition, there were 30 national, regional, state organizations represented there who were very, very much interested in the use of telecommunications in the instructional process. The range is as broad as the range of educational needs. And we know there are many needs with which we are faced in education today. I think that the mass media, certainly, can be used to increase the effectiveness of instruction in these areas.

REINHARDT: Richard Bell, Chairman of the National Coalition for Instructional Telecommunications and a professor at Nova University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He talked with Keith Staudte, WLRN, Miami, Florida.

MERROW: For all we know, instructional TV's future may be behind it. But the hubbub about TV and kids and schools generally isn't over. The PTA has launched a campaign to get the networks to reduce the amount of violence and sex on TV, and there's a large and heavy armful of books about TV's pernicious effects. Next week, we'll be talking about those issue.

REINHARDT: But before we leave the subject of TV and schools, let's talk about a curious phenomenon we've detected. It seems the most articulate defenders of the tube are teachers themselves. Some of them call attention to it, even praise it.

MERROW: Dr. Max Rafferty has an explanation for the teachers' curious posture. He says they're hiding behind TV by making it sound all-powerful, to get themselves off the hook.

TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF TELEVISION

RAFFERTY: Children, from time immemorial, have always spent more time doing other things than they spend in school, or that they spent studying at home. Before television, it was radio, with the tremendously popular radio programs of the 20s and the 30s. Before radio, they were out in moving picture theatres. Before that time, they were out climbing trees, or out in the middle of the river catching catfish ala Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer. Children have always done this, and the amount of time spent in school activities has always been less than the percentage of time devoted to other activities. So what the educationists are trying to do is find a scapegoat, a whipping boy for their own failures. Children aren't learning to read these days because they're not taught how to read properly down in the first, second, and third grades. They're not spelling well because no time is spent on spelling drills and memorization. They're not learning their number combinations because nobody's compelling them to do so. This is what's causing the decline in the test scores -- not television.

Television, of course, has certain excellent things on it for young people to watch, for children to watch. Sesame Street, the Electric Company, things like that. If you watch some of the educational television shows, you'll find perfectly marvelous dramatic productions on those night after night. And things like Steve Allen's Meeting of the Minds where you get characters, absolutely contradictory characters like Attila the Hun and Emily Dickenson, and people like that in replica and in costume, discussing their philosophies over a big dinner table. This sort of thing is unique with television. And I think television, in that respect, does a fine job. I have to agree that most of the commercial shows are junk, but that was true of the radio shows too.

REINHARDT: Dr. Max Rafferty, Dean of the School of Education at Troy State University in Alabema. He was interviewed for Options in Education by

Bruce Mims of Station WTSU, Troy, Alabama.

MERROW: Most teachers wouldn't agree that they're looking for a scapegoat, and they'll point to the statistics. By the time he graduates from high school, an average kid will have spent more hours watching TV than in school.

REINHARDT: But, again, teachers we've talked to speak of the power of TV with a kind of awe. I talked with Terry Herndon, Executive Director of the National Education Association, the teacher union with 1.7 million members.

A WORD FROM THE TEACHER UNIONS

HERNDON: Well, the fact that a child spends 27 or 30 hours a week with a very fast-paced television agenda, with a great variety of presentations, with animation, with trips around the world, with a variety of people and age groups, with a variety of action modes. That creates an expectation in the mind of that child and can make the more routine, pedagogical form of a classroom much less exciting than it might have been had school been the most exciting thing that happened to that child in the course of their life.

REINHARDT: Maybe school should be more exciting. Maybe the teachers aren't living up to expectations.

HERNDON: I think it would be desirable if schools would be more exciting. But there is great limitation on what one human being has the capacity to do for seven hours a day, as opposed to a TV entertainer who is on the tube for three or four or five minutes. It is then cut; they come back an hour later and make another three or four minutes. So, there is really an unrealistic kind of competition between the teacher and the television entertainer.

REINHARDT: Well now, the teacher really isn't in the classroom all by himself. That is, he can use television in the classroom. And yet, figures show that teachers don't, even today, use instructional television in the classroom as much as you would think they would.

HERNDON: I think the technology is not available in most schools. There are not very many schools, if any, that have the capacity to give each classroom or each classroom teacher access to the television system on a schedule that makes it optimally useful in that classroom. That would require production capacity in each room. That does not exist. That will never exist. So, it will always be a question of taking that which is generally available and adapting the classroom to it at a point in time. And I don't think that television ought to regulate the schedule for every class in America. I think there's an overwhelming prejudice among educators, myself included, in terms of using print media. There aren't many of us who are of the mind that we ought to set aside print media and begin instructing children through the selection of material that television is an acceptable alternative to print. I don't believe it is. Most teachers don't believe it is. Now, could teachers themselves become more performing artists? I would agree out of hand that the teacher that has the capacity to mesmerize students for hours every day is probably going to be more effective than the one who doesn't. But it would be an absurd expectation for us to ever believe that all or even a majority of American teachers can compete with Bill Cosby.

REINHARDT: Dr. Terry Herndon, the Executive Director of the National Education Association, in Washington, D.C.

* * *

(Excerpt from Spiderman, a childrens television program)

* * *

MERROW: Ready now for something completely different? How about a proposal for compulsory television? That's right. A required two hours of TV every night for the kids.

REINHARDT: The man making the proposal is a school superintendent, Dr.

Larry Cuban of the Arlington, Virginia, public schools. He wants the two hours to be free of commercials. The programming would be paid for by having every TV owner pay a license fee for each set in the house.

COMPULSORY TV

CUBAN: Some of the details, and there are only ideas at point, would be to have the programs run in the after-school, four to six, something like that. They would be targeted to different groups, stations would have responsibility for the content, but in cooperation with schools systems. And there are so many models of excellent TV programs, ranging from The Big Blue Marble, Zoom, Sesame Street, to documentaries that are appropriate for teenagers and above, that it doesn't necessarily need new content, new programs. There is much that can be used now, but not necessarily be re-runs. The point is that this would be program content that would supplement and enrich, and also teach kids in different areas that schools themselves cannot do. There would have to be some cooperative way of stations working with local school systems to do the programming.

REINHARDT: Now, we've heard an awful lot about TV's bad influence on kids. Not just violence, which I assum, you're saying, would not be in these programs, but also, it just encourages them to be passive. Are you saying to me that I should make my child be passive and watch TV?

CUBAN: It's not a matter of how much choice you have about it. Kids watch TV. TV is in 97 percent of the homes. The average amount of TV watching that's voluntary is what most people would consider enormous, around four to six hours or however many hours a day. So, it's not anything that we have a choice about. Kids do watch TV. The idea of compulsory is a bind for some people. I'm not sure about how harmful the effects of TV are. I'm not sure how positive the effects of TV are. But TV is, and it has an impact. And the question is, can this potency of TV be used in kids' best interests. TV is a very persuasive and influential medium. Why not regulate it more for content? Why not target it upon youngsters to have them learn more? We just haven't really exploited that.

MERROW: Dr. Larry Cuban, Superintendent of Schools in Arlington, Virginia.

* * *

(Excerpt from Charley's Angels, television program)

ANNOUNCER: "Next, on Charley's Angels ..."

REINHARDT: Well, that's wrong. Actually, next week, it's a close look at TV's impact on kids. Are we producing a generation of illiterates whose brains have turned to cotton candy because of all the TV?

MERROW: Or is the younger generation the best educated, most sensitive, etc., etc., etc., that we've ever produced?

REINHARDT: On OPTIONS IN EDUCATION next week, you'll hear from the networks, from Peggy Charren of Action for Children Television, from Grace Baisinger of the PTA, from Jeff Greenfield, author of Television: The First Fifty Years, and from Dr. George Gerbner, whose studies of violence on TV have angered the networks and helped change TV.

MERROW: Here's a preview: We asked Peggy Charren, Grace Baisinger, and George Gerbner to "role play," to be teachers for a moment and tell us how they'd use TV if they were in the classroom.

DREAM USES OF TELEVISION

CHARREN: I think that I would teach children how to make television, if I could do it without taking too much time from what else they were learning. I would certainly teach them how to make commercials. What kinds of things make you think certain things, and why should we have a commercial for a candy bar? Could we do the same thing for celery?

GERBNER: As we know, we all watch it, and I can find a way of making all watching more interesting. Let's play a little game. And that is what's the message behind the message. And so I say look at, for example, men and women. How come? You know that there as many women as men, if not more. How come that on television there are three times as many men as women? And what's the message behind it?

BAISINGER: Today, I probably wouldn't use it at all, because what we have found is that teachers haven't been prepared, and they don't understand it. And what I don't understand, I would not use. Teachers are very concerned, and many have expressed this to us, that by using it in the classroom, they may be encouraging even more television viewing. This is where I think the networks had better take a good, hard look at what they're doing.

MERROW: Our subject next: TV and its impact on children. You can transcripts of this two-part series by sending one dollar to National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Cassette tapes are available also, for ten dollars.

REINHARDT: When you write, ask for porgrams 127 and 128, "TV and Kids." And please tell us the call letters of your local NPR station. And if you want our free schedule for the next three months, just ask.

* * *

MERROW: Some of the material for this program came from Vivian Ducat and Joan Morgan, Station WGBH, Boston; Liane Hansen, WUHY, Philadelphia; Elizabeth Leopard, WSCI, Charleston, South Carolina; Henry Glenn, Station KLON, Long Beach, California; Keith Staudte, WLRN, Miami, Florida; Bruce Mims, Station WTSU, Troy, Alabama; Barbara Boyer Walter in San Francisco, and the Childrens Television Workshop, producers of Sesame Street and the Electric Company.

REINHARDT: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University.

MERROW: Principal support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education. Other funds come to us from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is written and produced by John Merrow. The Assistant Producer is Natalie Iglitz. Production assistance by Lee Demsey. Techincal assistance for this program by Skip Pizzi and Andy Rosenberg. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. And this is NPR, National Public Radio.

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"TV AND KIDS"
(Part II)

CHILD: A...

CHILD: B...

CHILD: C...

MAN: D...

WOMAN: H...

MAN: I...

MAN: J...

CHILD: K...

MAN: L...

TEENAGER: M...

WOMAN: N...

WOMAN: O...

WOMAN: P...

MERROW: T-I-O-N-S -- options -- OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. From the ABC's of pre-school to the alphabet soup of government programs, this is OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

* * *

GOLDSON: The so-called programs on television, the so-called content of it, that's like the stirofoam that comes in the box when you buy a radio, say. That's the packaging just to hold in place what you need to hold in place so that the commercial can hit you. You know, that stuff is not dramatic presentation; that's like a paint-by-numbers painting. Not only that the most precious human emotions -- love, compassion, social responsibility, caring -- not only that they're banalized in the stirofoam content of television, but even if you were to be so responsive that you were to find tears welling up into your eyes, say. At that moment, you're disengaged and you're slapped with a commercial. So that it's like an aborting process sometimes; it's something like coitus interuptus. You know, the very moment that you reach a climax -- whoosh! -- you're pulled out of the wall socket.

* * *

MERROW: That's Rose Goldson, author of The Show and Tell Machine. She's talking about TV, the boob tube that's in 97 percent of the homes in America today.

REINHARDT: She's only one of a large handful of authors who've written books recently about the pervasive and pernicious effects of television -- on society, on marriages, on families, on our moral fiber ...

MERROW: ... and on our children. TV's being blamed for declining test scores, rising drop-out rates, juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, inarticulateness, and immorality.

* * *

CHILD: Monday I watch "One Day at a Time" and "Mash." And then Tuesday, "Happy Days" and "Three's Company." Wednesday, "Eight is Enough," "Charley's Angels." Thursday I don't watch anything.

REINHARDT: Why is that?

CHILD: Nothing good on.

ANNOUNCER: Okay, Jim and Denise, Couple Number Five, fifteen and twenty-five would give you forty. Jim?

JIM: I'll say the living room.

ANNOUNCER: The living room! She said the living room! And Jim and Denise, you're are Newlywed Grand Prize Winner!

* * *

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and we're going to try to find out the ways that TV affects and influences our children.

REINHARDT: Last week we reported that some schools are using regular prime time programs in the curriculum. Instructional TV hasn't replaced the teacher, but one program, "The Electric Company," is used a lot in first grade. In a few schools, there's what's called "hands-on TV," in which kids get to make their own programs.

MERROW: A lot of people believe that TV is perhaps the single most important influence in the lives of many children, more important than home, church, school.

REINHARDT: Some children, the so-called heavy users of TV, watch more than forty hours a week, about six hours a day. The only thing they do more of is sleep.

MERROW: Even the so-called light users watch twenty hours a week, about three hours a day.

REINHARDT: At least half our kids' television consists of the prime time commercial fare, "Charley's Angels," "The Fonz," "The Hulk," "Wonder Woman," the "Muppets," and Walt Disney.

MERROW: They also watch commercials, between nine and twelve minutes of them every hour. That adds up to several hundred thousand commercials while they're growing up.

REINHARDT: And let's not forget sex and violence. There's a lot of both on the tube.

* * *

(Excerpt from "Charley's Angels" -- dialogue and sounds of guns and fighting)

* * *

HOW VIOLENT IS TELEVISION?

MATER: "Come 5:00 every weekday afternoon, millions of American children drop whatever they're doing and rush to the nearest set. Here, with feverish eyes and cocked ears, they listen for that first ear-splitting sound, which indicates that the children's hour is at hand. This introductory signal may be the wail of the police siren, the rattle of a machine gun, the explosion of a hand grenade, the shriek of a dying woman, the bark of a gangster's pistol, or the groan of a soul in purgatory."

REINHARDT: The voice belongs to Gene Mater, a vice president of CBS broadcasting. As you know, CBS is one of the three major, commercial networks. But he's not talking about television.

MATER: "Whatever it is, the implication is the same. Radio has resumed its daily task of cultivating our children's morals with blood and thunder effects." And that's a quote from American Mercury magazine, no longer with us, from 1938. Quotes like that are not unusual. Seventy years ago,

for example, there was a publication called The World Today which claimed that, and I quote, "American movies have often been found to encourage violent crimes and daring deeds of robbery." I've got a whole collection of these things. We have been blaming radio, we have been blaming television, we have been blaming motion pictures, the nickelodeon. I've got them going back about 70 or 80 years. We've always looked for somebody to blame. We're not going to blame the obvious. But I suggest that the home, the church, the school, and peer group pressure are far more important in the development of a child than radio or television or motion pictures ever were or ever will be.

There are those who constantly say there is too much violence on television. First of all, there is really no consensus as to a definition of violence. To some people, for example, Bugs Bunny pouring a pitcher of milk over a chipmunk's head is an act of violence. And I don't think it is, and I don't think the rest of the world thinks so. I recall one hearing, I guess it was about a year ago, in Washington, before a House committee, wherein a celebrated expert on violence was asked whether Marie giving Donny a playful poke in the ribs is an act of violence. And if you'll read the transcript, you'll find it runs about three and a half pages of unequivocal "Yes," "No," "Maybe," "I'll have to see it before deciding." Although it was definitely pushed that or definitely established that this is a playful shove. And Donny sort of loses his balance and laughs. Is this an act of violence? And yet this expert wouldn't even come out with a four-square answer one way or another.

MERROW: The expert you were referring to in the Washington testimony is Dr. George Gerbner. I take it you take exception to his whole way of statistical way of measurements and ratios and so on.

MATER: There is much that is wrong with George Gerbner's approach to violence, yes, starting with his definition and going on from there. If there were a tidal wave on a news broadcast, and two thousand people died -- or two people died -- he would consider that an act of violence, and I wouldn't.

MERROW: You said initially, you reacted to the phrase "too much." It's a question of what is "too much," how do we know when there is too much? Let me turn the question back to you, because you at CBS do certain things to control what's shown on TV, so you must, I think, have some -- in your head -- some measure of what is in fact too much violence.

MATER: Well, we're not going to put quotas on it, if that's what you're referring to. No, we have greatly reduced it. We have reduced not only the amount of violence, but in addition, we have changed the tone of violence. For example, you might hear a gun fired; you won't see the body fall. Or death, if you will, if off-screen,

MERROW: Is that corporate policy? I mean, did you all have a big meeting to arrive at a decision like that?

MATER: No, I think you're concept of the business world or world of television isn't quite the same as ours. No, it doesn't happen quite that way. It's an evolutionary process. I think that television is probably one of the most responsive industries in this country today. When certain voices were raised about the amount of violence, and concern was expressed, in terms of letters, in terms of words from our affiliates, in various articles in magazines and newspapers, et cetera. We made a conscious effort to reduce the level of violence, and indeed we did reduce it.

REINHARDT: Gene Mater, a vice president of CBS baoadcasting. He says that the top executives didn't purposely get together to decide to reduce violence; it was an evolutionary process.

MERROW: One key step in the evolution was the report of the U.S. Surgeon General in 1972 which said that TV violence could adversely affect some children. Then there was pressure from Congress, from citizens groups and from the Federal Communications Commission which regulates television.

REINHARDT: Don't forget falling ratings; that had a big effect. When people stopped watching the violent shows, when advertisers started putting their dollars into sit-coms -- situation comedies, then the evolutionary process speeded up.

GERBNER: Television, unlike other media, is watched non-selectively. Kids, or in fact adults; they don't watch by the program. They watch by the hour. They watch whatever is on when it fits into their style of life to watch.

MERROW: That's Dr. George Gerbner whose studies Gene Mater of CBS was criticizing. Gerbner is Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania.

REINHARDT: For eleven years, Gerbner has been measuring the amount of violence on TV, and up until the fall of 1977, it seemed to be increasing every year.

MERROW: Last fall, however, Gerbner and his associates found that the violence had decreased from seven or eight incidents per hour to six and one half per hour during prime time, and from 24 incidents per hour to 16 or 18 during children's programming on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

REINHARDT: But what disturbs Gerbner more than the amount of violence is the pattern -- who does what to whom. Gerbner says white, middle class men are more likely to inflict violence on women, the old, the young, and racial minorities than the other way around.

MERROW: According to Gerbner, that pattern encourages so-called weaker members of society to learn the role of victim. They're being conditioned.

REINHARDT: Gerbner also found out that heavy viewers of TV, meaning four or more hours a day, are more influenced by TV violence than light users, those watching one or two hours a day. He conducted a survey. Let me try one of the questions out on you, John. What are your chances -- this is in real life, now -- of encountering violence in an average week? Fifty-fifty, one in ten, or one in a hundred?

MERROW: I don't know. Tell me the answer.

REINHARDT: Well, the right answer is one in a hundred. In fact, it's more like one in two hundred. But the heavy users of TV were much more likely to say "fifty-fifty." Why? Well, maybe because they watch so much TV, and on the tube the chances of encountering violence are greater than fifty-fifty. They've started believing that TV is reality.

MERROW: Just what is violence on TV? What about a playful shove? Is that a violent act?

REINHARDT: Gerbner has been accused of having a too rigid definition, one that even includes comedy routines. I asked him about violence that's meant to be funny.

GERBNER: Violence is a demonstration of power, and its effects have nothing to do with presumably whether it's serious or presumably humorous. In fact, humor is a very effective way of conveying many lessons, particularly lessons of vulnerability. The most offensive thing can only be said in joke. They can hurt and they can have a telling effect. So, the evidence shows that violence in a comic context has important lessons to teach, that much real life violence, especially among children, is done in what they think is a joke, but has serious consequences. The second controversial part is accidental violence, natural catastrophes, acts of God, and so on. Well, we feel that there are no accidents in fiction; we're looking at drama. That a pattern of victimization is written into the script by a writer; it is not there accidentally. You usually have an accident because you have a secondary character who has not committed a crime, but who has to be shown as weak and vulnerable and has to be gotten rid of some way. So they invent an accident to get rid of a particular character. Or you have a pathetic victim of a natural catastrophe. Well, interestingly enough, victims of natural catastrophes usually come from other times and other places, and they're other kinds of people.

To destroy 5,000 Chinese in some kind of an exotic movie by a tidal wave or an earthquake -- or Japanese or whatnot -- is always much easier

than to do the same to Englishmen or to Dutchmen or to Germans or to Americans. Now, television is always a cultural arm of the established order, and it has to introduce people into that social order and into that social structure. So the function of this kind of -- what we see as inequitable socialization or inequitable distribution of fear is that indeed, if you are poor, if you are old, if you are non-white, if you're a woman, if you're all of these, you better be a little more afraid. You are more vulnerable. In a sense, it is realistic. But, to be realistic and to adjust to an unjust situation is the paradox with which we are dealing.

Every society has to introduce and adjust people to the conditions that prevail. But it's one thing to say, "these are the conditions that prevail, and you better be careful or otherwise you get hurt." And it's quite another thing to say, "these are the conditions that prevail, and they are right. They should remain what they are; all you should do is protect yourself, watch out for yourself."

MERROW: Dr. George Gerbner, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, part of the Universtiy of Pennsylvania. Gerbner has found that violence is down these days -- there's less of it on TV.

REINHARDT: But apparently the violence is being replaced, by sex.

(Excerpt of TV movie, "Tom and Joanne")
MAN: "I won't seal you in; I won't ask anything from you. But I find you beautiful. My eyes can't be sad if they're looking at you.

WOMAN: My driveway lights. Mrs. Jadnowski is going to turn them on in about three minutes.

MAN: Shall I take you home?

WOMAN: I want to make love to you."

WHAT ABOUT SEX ON TELEVISION?

ABEL: I guess, personally, I would feel that sex on television is probably preferable to violence on television. I'm sure there are a large number of people who disagree with that. But, I would prefer that my own child would be exposed to sex on television than violence on television, even sexual acts, of which I don't think there are any on now anyway.

MERROW: Dr. John Abel, a professor at Michigan State University and a consultant to the FCC's Task Force on Children's Broadcasting. He told Barbara that sex on TV is hard to measure because researchers don't know what sex is.

ABEL: You have a problem here. And social scientists are not necessarily ones to agree with what is sex on television. I mean, some people will consider kissing. Well, kissing can be an act of love that's asexual, that has no sexual overtones whatsoever. Rape; is rape violence or is it sex? It certainly has aspects of both, but how would you categorize that? Flirting; there's reference to homosexuality activity, but do you see homosexual acts? Do you see heterosexual acts on television? I think the studies of the content of television -- there were no incidents in which there were sexual acts of intercourse, heterosexual intercourse or homosexual intercourse -- that have been shown on television.

REINHARDT: Even without showing explicitly; just showing the people while they're doing it?

ABEL: Right. There's been no evidence that that has been shown, and these are the samples. But, I personally have not seen any; I doubt that you have seen any. And it does not appear that there are sexual acts on television of the nature of what we generally refer to as sexual acts. Now, there's sexual innuendo and there are sexual references. References to having sexual intercourse with someone. But, as far as actually showing the acts. So, what do you study in that context? Do you study the references to it? Do you study kissing? Do you study people being shown in bed with each other? Do you study flirting? Do you count the inches of bare skin? Do you count frontal nudity

versus back nudity? You know, I mean, what is sex? Violence seems to be a bit clearer, although that is, there are even some grey areas in that. As far as the effects of sexual content on television, that really has not been studied yet. There are really almost no studies that deal directly with -- particularly with the effect on children -- of showing sex on television, however we define sex on television.

REINHARDT: If sexual innuendo is increasing, though, it is conceivable that eventually the acts themselves will be shown on television.

ABEL: "Conceivable" is a good pun there I suppose. But yes, it might be shown on television. I think it's also clear that sex on television -- if you say that violence on television relates to violent behavior in children, and the evidence, as I mentioned there, seems fairly clear, that yes it does affect them -- you could also argue, using the same perspective, that sex on television does affect children and they may, in fact, re-enact some sexual acts if there are such sexual acts on television at a later point in their life, or a later point in their play with other children, of the same sex or opposite sex.

MERROW: Dr. John Abel, a professor at Michigan State University and consultant to the FCC's Task Force on Children's Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: He and George Gerbner are social scientists, both studying TV and its effects on children and adults. Most studies are of the short term effects, that is, what do viewers do immediately after watching?

MERROW: But the key question really is, what long term effect does it have? And that's hard to study, and very expensive.

REINHARDT: The social scientists usually compare "light users" and "heavy users," never "non-users." Why? It's simple actually. There aren't enough of them. Everybody watches TV, especially the kids.

KEEPING AN EYE ON TELEVISION

OSBORNE: Television's very existential. We don't think about the cumulative impact it has, or the messages. And I just want people to be more aware of the fact that the dominant message in television is that you can buy happiness -- I call is the McDonald's philosophy of life, that somebody's going to do it all for you.

MERROW: Nancy Osborne is Vice President of WATCH, the Washington Association for Television and Children. She says that half of the TV kids watch is prime time commercial TV.

OSBORNE: A lot of people use television as sort of an escape. They come home from work. They turn on their television set. It has an enormous amount of power in the house in terms of how the family structure is scheduled. We plan dinner around television. The homework is planned around television. Our lifestyle seems to revolve around this big schedule that is set out by three networks. And that's an enormous amount of power. Within the day, we look at the program for the day, we watch it. Sometimes we absorb more of it than we're willing to really acknowledge. From that standpoint, it's sort of an existential, immediate escape.

Television is a little bit like eating or drinking. A little bit is great. But if you drink too much you become an alcoholic. If you eat too much you become fat.

MERROW: If you watch too much TV?

OSBORNE: You become a TV adict. And that has, particularly on children, that has an effect on how they develop cognitively, their ability to develop complex skills. These are skills that are learned by exercising. The ability to interact. I don't know a whole lot of people who sit down and have a family meal with that much interaction at night. If they're sitting down together, perhaps the television is on, and it's doing the talking for them. That's the sneaky thing about this thing. What really spurred me to get involved in this

whole impact of television, is one night my daughter, when she was five years old, said she couldn't go to bed at night, and would I please bring her a Sominex. Now, I'm not a pill-taking person. I have the same jar of aspirin I had when she was born. And yet, I would have the news on when I was fixing dinner, and she would be in there watching it with me, and somewhere along the line, she had picked up that there's a pill to solve your problem; if you can't go to sleep, take a Sominex. And I thought, you know, if she's going to hear that message repeated 365 days a year, it means that I've got to do an incredible song and dance for the fact that you don't take pills do solve problems. When a child hears 10,000 commercials a year to eat junk food, it puts an enormous burden on a parent to do a song and dance for broccoli and turnips and eggs, right? And I'm not sure I can compete with a force that is that powerful, particularly when that force becomes reinforced by her peers, and becomes reinforced in the supermarkets, when the food is on a low level to catch your attention at eye level. I mean, the odds are against mom and dad.

MERROW: Nancy Osborne, Vice President of WATCH, Washington Association for Television and Children, a citizens group in Washington, D.C.

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CHILD: I like "The Incredible Hulk" and all that. It just turns me on.

REINHARDT: Why?

CHILD: Well, I like when he turns into the "Incredible Hulk." Everybody screams.

CHILD: "All My Children." I watch that every day. I have to. I can't miss it. 'Cause it goes on everyday and you've got to see what happens. Or if you miss one, you don't know what's happening the next time you watch it.

CHILD: Well now in the summer, I'm not really watching that much. I'm really more listening to the stereo, more than I did during school. 'Cause school, you know, you get home around 3:00, you know, there are good shows on and all that. But now, in the morning, I listen to the stereo. I turn off the stereo like around 3:00.

REINHARDT: Then you turn on the TV.

CHILD: Yeah!

REINHARDT: What is your best television night?

CHILD: Definitely Friday. No, Saturday night! Saturday. "Fantasy Island," "Love Boat," "Saturday Night Live." For sure, for sure. Definitely.

REINHARDT: What do you do if the television's broken?

CHILD: Got two of them.

CHILD: Call a repair shop.

CHILD: I'd die.

(Montage of commercials)

MONTAGE: "You've won $25,000 in the publisher's clearninghouse giveaway. Wow, I'm stunned. Fran, where are my keys. Where you put them last time. Oh, brother, how am I going to find anything in all this stuff? Look, three hairbrushes, two anti-perspirants. Two anti-perspirants, why two? I've got to have my secret. American Express Travelers Checks; don't leave home without them. Come on Don, is there a difference between teas? Mm, a bunch! They put the dandiest blend of teas I ever tasted in this flow-through bag. You can count on crest for a future of good checkups, tests prove it. Feelin' good, feelin' good, at Gino's...

REINHARDT: MacDonalds, Chevies, Sominex -- maybe that's what kids learn

from TV. That's what the citizens groups say. But what about the networks? What are they saying?

A RESPONSE FROM THE NETWORKS

HOOVER: Children in this country watch television. And we're kidding ourselves if we think otherwise. I think parents should think about this as an issue. They should think about whether they want their children to watch. They should think about how much they want their children to watch, and they should discuss these things with their children. And they should recognize that just because television is in the home, they are not powerless. It is astonishing to me that people feel powerless against television. First of all, they buy it and put it in their homes. Frequently they buy extra sets for their children, and then claim that we're invading their homes, which I find astonishing.

MERROW: That's Julie Hoover, Director of the East Coast Office of Program Standards and Practices for ABC Television. That's the office that censors programs before they go on the air.

REINHARDT: Her position, that parents bear the major responsibility, is generally the networks' line -- they just make the programs, and it's up to parents to control which ones their kids watch.

MERROW: I asked Julie Hoover what she thinks children learn from TV.

HOOVER: By learn, do mean are they going to get a different image of the country they live in, or a different image of the people in the country? I mean, I think by and large, children sit down and watch television as entertainment, and I don't think that in any specific sense, you can say what they're learning.

MERROW: Now, wait a minute. Earlier, you told me that you in your job try to put in moral lessons. You try to put in -- you know, do away with sexual stereotype, put in ethnic characters. You must believe in the educational power of TV to change people. Now I'm asking you what do you think they learn, and you're hedging.

HOOVER: I don't mean to hedge. I'm not sure I understand the question. I know that from a standards and practices point of view, when we watch a program, and let's say it's an episode of "Eight is Enough" and the 16-year old daughter wants to go on birth control pills. And we did have such an episode. What we wanted to make sure was that there was a full discussion of it, that this wasn't something that we decided to do in a flippant way, in a hurried way; it was a cause of concern. And she raises the question with her father who reacted in a possibly stereotypical way. The father is alarmed that his 16-year old daughter would be thinking about something like this. And then she raised the subject with her stepmother, and her stepmother counselled her to go and see a doctor and get medical advice. She raised the issue with her sisters, and the sisters raised questions about who was she involved with, and responsibilities. It was not deep discussion, but it was an issue that was important enough to be discussed and not to be lightly and humorously resolved.

MERROW: Why? Because you believe something about the impact on the audience, right?

HOOVER: Well, because, sure. It's not so much that we we're convinced that everything that goes on television is going to have a tremendous impact, but we feel that as a mass medium we have a greater responsibility. As a ubiquitous medium, we have a greater responsibility than the publishers of books, than the publishers of magazines, than, presumably, the producers of movies.

MERROW: Do you think that's a real issue, the question of violence on TV, and the fact that kids ape what they see? Do you resent that even being brought up, all the research and studies being done?

HOOVER: My personal opinion is that there's an enormous amount of hypocrisy in this world, an enormous amount. A lot of the people that complain -- and this is a very personal opinion, this is not the corporate ABC opinion

-- we are, as a corporation, as a department, terribly concerned that a medium so persasive be discrete and careful. But, my personal opinion, as I said, is that there's an enormous amount of hypocrisy, that people write in and they say they aren't concerned about their children, because they are careful. But, it's everybody else's children. I think there is an enormous amount of unconscious, or self-conscious, racism. There is an enormous amount of, well, racism, and hypocrisy in these comments. For instance, and this is not on the violence issue; this is more on a social issue. It is terribly difficult for ABC to program in any way issues of adolescent sexuality.

People are terribly fearful. The reason they are fearful -- and if I were the parent of an adolescent, I might suffer from the same fear -- is that they are terrified that if teenagers hear about sex, they will want to do it. Now, what terrible thing will happen if they do it, no one quite wants to articulate. And then there's the terrible part: if they're going to do it, can they use birth control? Should we talk to them about birth control? I mean, there's tremendous confusion on the part of adults in this country as to what they want to teach adolescents about sexuality. Television is absolutely caught in the middle of this, and we are faced with subject matter that is of enormous interest, enormous concern. You read in newspapers easily two, three, four times a month that studies, that venereal disease is rampant among teenagers, that teenagers are sexually active.

MERROW: But, your point is that we as a society are hypocritical. Is it also that television just goes along with the hypocrisy? I'm not quite sure I follow.

HOOVER: Television is not a leader in society. It moves slowly on issues, so that things that newspapers can discuss very easily and very freely television is going to discuss cautiously. And we do that because, as I have said, we are ubiquitous and we are so pervasive. And therefore we feel that we have a special responsibility and also because we don't want to be seen as taking sides in what many people perceive as controversial issues.

MERROW: The critics say that what you're really worried about is whether the advertisers would pull out.

HOOVER: Well, we are commercial television. Let's not kid ourselves. We need advertiser support. And it is advertiser support that brings the Olympics. It's advertiser support that brings the shows you love, and somehow we don't object when it brings the shows you love. But we all go wild when it brings the shows you hate. Yes, we need advertiser support. That does not mean that within any given show we say, "Oh, we can't offend 'X' soap company or 'Y' tire company," because happily there are many, many, many companies out there and so we can be reasonably certain that we can find that for a popular show, advertiser support. But, let's not kid ourselves. We're a business.

Most of us do let children eat candy. Given the fact that they're going to eat candy, that we let them eat candy, let them know what candy is on the market. Let them know, if they're going to eat cereal, what cereals are on the market. And let them know what toys are on the market.

MERROW: How about let them know the effect of candy on their teeth?

HOOVER: That is a parent's job, that is a school's job. We are also doing nutritional -- I think ABC is now -- I don't think ABC, I know ABC is now doing nutritional messages, we are --

MERROW: Why isn't that the job of the public airwaves? Not ABC, but those publically licensed airwaves?

HOOVER: I think that the airwaves do. We do have public service announcements. We do have programming that is of interest to communities. We do have science editors who talk about all kinds of things, whether it be household accidents or nutrition. We do have consumer reporters on our news. I think this is an issue; consumerism is a hot issue in this country. And I think that the networks and the local stations are covering it more, and I think that we will cover all aspects of it. Advertising covers one thing. And in public service announcements, and in news and in documentary programming,

and in "Good Morning, America," --

MERROW: We're talking about children's programming and the advertisements for the sugar coated cereals, and so on. There's nothing on those public airwaves or on ABC that says, "Oh, listen kids, the major ingredient in that cereal is sugar, not cereal, and sugar rots your teeth.

HOOVER: Sugar does not rot your teeth. Not brushing your teeth rots your teeth. And people are going to eat sugar, and they are going to eat candy, and let's not be hypocrites and pretend that children don't like it. It's very good tasting. And it is on the market because people buy it.

MERROW: Julie Hoover, East Coast Director of ABC's Standards and Practices Division, in New York City.

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(Excerpt of commercial for MacDonald's)

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REINHARDT: All that talk about commercials, sugar, and children's TV reminds us that there's talk about restricting the kinds of products that can be advertised on children's programs. The Federal Trade Commission may hold hearings on the subject, although the networks are lobbying heavily against that idea.

MERROW: And the Federal Communications Commission is under pressure to keep track of the time devoted to commercials during children's TV.

REINHARDT: The pressure is coming from ACT, Action for Children's Television, a Boston group. For ten years, ACT has been pushing the networks to amke better children's programs, with considerable success.

MERROW: Peggy Charren, one of the founders, says ACT is pragmatic. She rejects the broadside criticism of TV that's popular today. Barbara and I asked her about Marie Winn's book, The Plug in Drug, which argues that any TV watching, no matter how good the program, is basically bad for kids because TV is a mesmerizing drug.

ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

CHARREN: We think that she has an elitist, unrealistic attitude toward television. She would like to do away with it. Well, maybe a lot of people would, but it's not going to happen. Television is going to change; the technology is going to change and the kinds of experiences people will have with it will change, but it will not go away. We will not go back to radio, as beneficial as that may have been to the nation's imaginations. So we think it's more constructive to think of helping television to provide some kinds of experiences that will delight as they benefit.

MERROW: But now that's an elitist position too, thinking that you're going to help television. Who chose you? I mean, who chose you to try to speak to try to change TV?

CHARREN: Well, we're very sensitive to that problem. Nobody chose us. And, unfortunately, I didn't choose myself to decide what those programs should be. ACT is more concerned about the First Amendment than it is about junk food for the eyes on television. And we have designed a program that we think gets around the kinds of problems that I think you're talking about.

REINHARDT: But, people do seem to want the kinds of shows that get the high ratings, the shows with a lot of action.

CHARREN: Yeah, we think they're going to stay there and they should. We think there's room for a lot of different kinds of shows on television. What we talk about is diversity. We talk about it in terms of the kinds of characters that are on television that's designed for children. We worry less about television that children see that's designed for adults, because we don't think that you can or should turn the airwaves into programming for children,

'cause then I'm sure that I wouldn't want to watch much of it, except with my young child. We think that when the programming is children's programming, according to the broadcaster, it's unfortunate that it's 99 percent white, as a study that we just commissioned from a professor at Boston University showed, that after-school television on the commercial stations around the country -- the programs for children from three to six in the afternoon -- is 99 percent white. Now, in a country where the population is not 99 percent white, and we're concerned and delighted with the diversity that makes up this country, we think that's inappropriate and that, although you can't make laws about it, you can, for examply push for the kinds of rules -- an agency like the Federal Communications Commission -- that cause broadcasting to have hiring practices that put decision-makers from all kinds of races and ethnic groups into important positions. Because then television will be less racist. It is racist to be 99 percent white, just as it is sexist to be four to one female and to have all the spokespeople on programming directed to children male, for example.

So that it's a question of how you go about making this change You don't say to the broadcaster, "Take this program off the air; I don't like it." We don't say that about any program that's on television. And we don't even say, "Put this on because I do," because we think that's a kind of censorship too. What we do say is that there's a diverse collection of people that make up that two to eleven-year old market that commercial broadcasters talk about, and it's important that broadcasting that's supposed to serve that audience to be as diverse as possible.

MERROW: Now, you've been at this for a number of years. Do you think TV is any better for all the trouble that you've caused?

CHARREN: Well, I certainly can understand your question. It certainly hasn't improved very much. But we've learned after ten years of existence as a consumer group to look for crumbs and for the kinds of things that do provide alternatives. First of all, in the ten years that ACT's been around, public broadcasting has come into its own. We started in '68; the public broadcasting act was '67, and there wasn't much programming for children even on PBS. Now, that is a fruitful place for a concerned parent to look. And I would suggest to Marie Winn, whose book takes the position that a good program is as bad as a piece of junk, that "Once Upon a Classic," or "Sesame Street," or "Zoom," or the after-school special on ABC is as big a problem for children as a speed racer or one of the more peculiar programs that broadcasters call children's programs -- "Bewitched," the kinds of recycled adult programs that then get put on children's after-school time and then get filled with children's commercials. We don't think that's true.

MERROW: You would suggest to Marie Winn that she's wrong?

CHARREN: Yes, we think she's absolutely wrong. And that just as children can and should be allowed to read comic books, they can and should be allowed to watch some junk on television. But they get a different kind of experience from reading, "Summer of the German Soldier," or looking at one of Maurice Sendak's picture books. So we think that quality programs on television give a kind of experience to a child, and even to a young child, that -- if it's the right program, and certainly there are few enough of those -- that is something that is productive and desirable as long as the experience doesn't mean that the parent then uses television as a babysitter.

MERROW: They do learn, though, you're saying? They can learn from TV?

CHARREN: Not only learn, but there's a benefit from enjoyment.

MERROW: Peggy, what do they fail to learn about the world, about themselves, because they are watching television?

CHARREN: I think one of the problems is what they're not doing when they're watching. If you're spending most of your leisure time in front of the televison set, you're not learning how to interact with people, you're not learning how to talk to your family, you're not learning how to spend your time doing nothing. You're not playing jacks, you're not walking in the park. You're not doing all the things that children did when they were growing up. Now, every once in a while, I think of the pictures in my mind, probably from the movies I've seen, maybe even from television, of Dicken's England. And I

imagine a lot of children growing up in Dicken's England had plenty of problems too. Sometimes when we think of no television, we think of this ideal world where parents, when you're sick, feed you chicken soup and talk, and play all kinds of games. In fact, before television there was radio, and there have always been parents who don't spend enough time with their children. One of the unfortunate things about television is that gives parents additional excuses not to spend time with their children, and that's probably as important as any education a child gets.

MERROW: Peggy Charren, the head of Action for Children's Television, a citizens group in Boston.

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REINHARDT: Do you watch television?

CHILD: Yes.

REINHARDT: A lot?

CHILD: Yeah.

REINHARDT: How much?

CHILD: About five hours a day.

REINHARDT: Why? What is so great that you'd watch it five hours a day?

CHILD: It's fun.

REINHARDT: If your television set were broken, what would you do?

CHILD: Read. Read, play games, cards, or something. Or you just might play the piano or the organ. Well, if the electricity was out.

REINHARDT: Would you have as much fun doing all these things?

CHILD: No. On TV we get to watch all these other people, but when we play we get bored.

* * *

REINHARDT: Another citizens group has gotten into the action recently, and that's the PTA, the National Parent Teachers Association. The PTA is trying to get its members to boycott certain programs. The goal: reduce TV violence.

MERROW: The organization has done more than that, though. It's trying to get advertisers to stop putting their dollars behind programs the PTA finds offensive, shows like "Charley's Angels," "Three's Company," "Baretta," and "Starsky and Hutch." So far, only one big company, Sears, has publically announced it will no longer advertise on "Charley's Angels" and "Three's Company," but other firms may follow Sears example.

REINHARDT: The PTA is also developing a curriculum for "critical TV viewing" for grades kindergarten through twelve. Among the underwriters of that project are CBS and NBC television.

MERROW: One more strategy on the PTA planning board. If the level of violence doesn't decline, then the PTA says it's going to ask the Federal Communications Commission to deny licenses to five network owned and operated TV stations in Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit.

REINHARDT: The PTA also rates programs and puts out its list of the ten best. On the list, "Donny and Marie," "Little House on the Prairie," and "The Waltons." I asked Grace Baisinger, the President of the PTA, if non-violent programs like "The Waltons" are much of an improvement. After all, at the end of each week's program, all problems are solved.

A WORD FROM THE PTA

BAISINGER: The important thing about it is that the conflict -- there is conflict in these programs. The conflict is resolved, not through violence, but through discussion, through mediation, through concession. And in a normal society, this is the way we do resolve conflict. That is not to say that some conflict is not resolved through violence, and the PTA has never said that we should have only programs like "The Waltons" or "Little House on the Prairie." What we are saying is that there should be a great variety of programming so that people can make some intelligent choices about what they want to watch. Many people in this country do not live in large cities. They do not have five or six channels to choose from. With the way the networks program and counter-program, people find during the family viewing time, during the prime time hours of eight, nine o'clock, ten o'clock at night that they have a choice of "Starsky and Hutch" and "Charley's Angels." In other words, they have a choice of one violent program or another violent program.

REINHARDT: But violence isn't the only thing we're missing in these shows. Also some kind of diversity of lifestyle.

BAISINGER: These shows do have some diversity of lifestyle too. They were rated primarily on three criteria. One had to do with the quality of life, how conflict is resolved. The second criteria had to do with the fact as to whether they were stereotyped in terms of sexual or ethnic. Now, our monitors found that they were not stereotypic; there was not this sexploitation, sexual abuse of humanity, which, for example, "Charley's Angels" and some that are promised for the fall season appear to suggest. The third quality had to do with the technical aspects of the program. Were dialogue of a high level? Were the technical effects, the sound, the color, the development of plot -- were all these of a high quality? And our viewers found that generally speaking they were in these programs.

The PTA is developing a program review guide and with it, it issued instructions to its own members and to the public to whom it was sent that they look at it carefully, they study it, and they set some standards for themselves. The PTA does not try to impose on anyone a PTA standard. What it is saying: if we will provide you information, we ask you to study it, look at it carefully, and then make your own family decision.

REINHARDT: Let's look at those parents. Are they really doing it? Aren' they just going ahead and letting their kids watch whatever they want?

BAISINGER: Well, we have a little bit of both. It's very interesting. Right after the guide came out, "Little House on the Prairie" was number one in the ratings. And we also know that when we reviewed some children's programming, and made this known, their audience went up tremendously. Of course, parents should watch TV with their children, should monitor, should discuss television. Television should be an educational experience for both children and parents. But if we're talking about TV's portraying reality, and their responsibility to portray reality, then we also must point out that in reality, many parents cannot watch TV. We know that in some of our elementary schools today, more than half the children come from single parent homes. These parents are also working parents. They simply don't have the time; not that they don't want to watch, but circumstances force them to do other kinds of things.

MERROW: Grace Baisinger, President of the PTA. That organization's campaigning against TV violence has come in for some criticism, in particular from Jeff Greenfield, author of Television: The First Fifty Years.

THE POWER BEHIND TELEVISION

GREENFIELD: I've got nothing against the PTA; I am a "P" and I am occasionally a "T." But the idea that their number one priority is violence on television tells us more than they intend to about where their heads are. I mean, at a time when nobody knows how we're going to finance the school system, or turning out a generation of kids who can't read -- although they blame TV for that too -- that the number one priority is television violence? In the first place, a lot of TV critics don't watch a lot of TV, because the amount of TV violence in the past five years has shrunk drastically. I think one of the

reasons is the cycle has worn off. These people who program television are very competitively oriented, and the stuff just doesn't sell. The top shows now are comedies. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, this to me is an echo of what went on in New York twenty-five years ago, thirty years now, when a couple of fairly prominent psychologist types argued that the comic books that kids were reading were turning us into a bunch of juvenile delinquents.

MERROW: I remember those terrific comics.

GREENFIELD: They were "Tales from the Crypt," "Tales from the Vault," I guess, I think "Midnight" was one of them. And they were the most disgusting, clinical horror comics imaginable. The argument in New York, which finally wound up with these comic books being sanitized out of existence was that this wave of juvenile delinquency -- and this, by the way, was before TV was a mass medium -- was attributable to these things; we had to get rid of them. I think people are always willing to look for accessible explanations for complicated events.

REINHARDT: Jeff Greenfield attacks the PTA and praises Action for Childrens Television, ACT. He says the power of TV is not its ubiquitousness, but the corporate monopoly.

GREENFIELD: The problem is that it concentrates so much power in so few hands while it delivers so much. There's no question in my mind that one of the things that makes television different, particularly when we think about children, is that it concentrates a lot of things that used to be gotten in disparate ways. Comic books, Saturday morning trips to the movies, radio, occasionally even printed books themselves; all of these things television now delivers. It delivers comic books in the form of Saturday morning adventure. It delivers radio shows in the form of the kind of prime time shows kids watch. So that's a problem. And the fundamental, yeah, I think is the economic contration, the fact that so few decision-makers decide so much for us about what is on TV, the inability of most alternate sources to gain access.

MERROW: Marie Winn, in her book The Plug in Drug, says that TV is a kind of mesmerizer, it's a kind of pacifier. And that kids -- it's a one-way trip; when you're watching television, you're not really putting anything out. She goes on to say that kids, after watching TV, feel a whole lot of frustration and anger. And it doesn't matter what they watch; it's how much they watch Now, you're critical of Marie Winn, I think, and that whole line of reasoning.

GREENFIELD: Look, you can watch anybody watching television for several hours, and they come away glassy-eyed and slant-jawed. Let me tell you, I remember leaving the movie theatre, the old Nemo which is now a supermarket or something, up on Broadway, after seven hours on a typical Saturday -- twenty cartoons, a western, you know, "Tarzen Meets the Bobsy Twins," newsreels, the coming attractions. I had a headache every Saturday afternoon of my life for about five years 'cause it was a mesmerzing condition. Sure, it was. But, I think you can be mesmerized by comic books. You can be mesmerized by any source of one-way data. And I just think that the idea that television is this Moloch which is so powerful that it strips kids of everything else misses the point. Look, there are some children who sit in front of the TV all day, okay? That tells us something about the way those kids are being raised. Are the parents to be somehow exonerated from the responsibility of saying, "You can't watch TV from these hours; you've got to do something else?" That's not the hardest thing in the world to say to a child.

MERROW: You know, a lot of people say television's the thing we love to hate. You're going a step further. You're saying, in the act of hating this TV and criticizing TV, we are, in effect, avoiding biting the real bullet, avoiding confronting the real question.

GREENFIELD: Absolutely. The thing that most interested me about this spate of TV criticism is that to me, it perfectly fits the mood of our times, which is a very apolitical, non-analytical mood. The questions that these kinds of issues ought to raise are very basic political questions. Who decided that television ought to be this concentrated? Who decided that it was a

license to print money? Who decided who has access to this -- and I concede the point -- this very powerful medium? Where are the structures within this country to provide children -- hell, to provide adults as well, but especially children, since that's what we're talking about -- with all kinds of sources of enrichment? The television networks are not responsible for this. They are not a uniquely evil institution. They are another industry. And the questions one ought to be raising about how the broadcast medium is organized are same questions we ought to be raising about how the auto and steel and other industries are organized. But, because we so fear television and it is so omnipresent, our reaction to it is just turn it off, just make it go away, instead of saying, "What could we do with this thing to make it better?"

The more that you are confident, as a parent, that you're spending time with your kid, that you're showing your kid active pleasures, such as exercise and intellectual pleasures such as reading, getting out of the house, moving around, experiencing life, the less you have to fear from television.

REINHARDT: Jeff Greenfield, author of Television: The First Fifty Years.

* * *

CHILD: Yeah, TV's a good thing. 'Cause when you have nothing to do, you always have the TV, you know. But you try and do worthwhile things. But TV always is interesting. (laughs) It is, you know.

REINHARDT: Why would anybody ever have nothing to do? With all the books in the world, all the sports there are to take part in, all the musical instruments to play?

CHILD: A lot of kids just like to be entertained by sitting on their duff and just doing something like being entertained like that.

REINHARDT: You, though? Do you?

CHILD: Well, that's just sometimes the reason. Sometimes you don't feel like doing anything, reading or moving your eyes. So you just watch the TV.

CHILD: Well, like when you're eating something, or like you do three things at the same time. The TV's just on, you know?

REINHARDT: Do you watch television?

CHILD: Um, not much.

REINHARDT: Not much? Do you know you are the first person who's answered "not much" when I asked that question? What would be your idea of an ideal way to spend an afternoon or evening in the summer?

CHILD: Well, I like to catch fireflies at night. That's what I do.

MERROW: What's the impact of TV on kids? Well, the network people tell us, "Hey, don't worry, look at how everybody is into jogging and health foods. That shows TV isn't all that powerful."

REINHARDT: But the critics, people like Marie Winn and Rose Goldsen, warn us that TV is worse than cotton candy for the mind -- it's doing real damage to our kids.

MERROW: What's the truth? Well, one truth may be that TV is influencing some kids more than others -- kids from split homes, kids with working parents. They often have TV as their babysitter.

REINHARDT: But, as Jeff Greenfield suggests, those hours in front of a TV may be a better alternative than, say, riding the subway all afternoon, or experimenting with drugs.

MERROW: We also get conflicting opinions on what should be done.

Should we concentrate our energies on making the networks more responsive? Or on teaching our kids to be more critical viewers. Either of those apparently would make the commercial networks happy.

REINHARDT: What wouldn't please ABC, CBS, and NBC would be a political effort to break up their oligopoly, to force them to sell their own TV stations, or a campaign to force every TV station to set aside a couple of hours a day for non-commercial programming.

MERROW: THis is a good time to think about these issues, because the Federal Communications Act is being rewritten right now.

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REINHARDT: Now, here's our commercial message, just in case you want either the transcript or cassette of this two-part series on Tv and kids. The transcript costs one dollar, the cassettes, ten dollars.

MERROW: Here's our address: National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036.

REINHARDT: When you write, ask for Programs 127 and 128, "TV and Kids." And ask for our free program schedule which tells you what's ahead on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION for the next three months.

MERROW: And please tell us the call letters of your lecal NPR station.

REINHARDT: Some of the material for this program came from NPR's Keith Talbot.

MERROW: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University. Principal support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education. Other funds come to us from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is written and produced by John Merrow. The Assistant Producer is Natalie Iglitz. Production assistance by Lee Demsey. Technical assistance for this program by Skip Pizzi and Andy Rosenberg. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. And this is NPR, National Public Radio.